

# Editor's Preface

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*Stefanie Ernst*

This first English edition of “On Norbert Elias” is a translation of the third, recently adapted edition in German. The German book was written and published in the 1980s by Suhrkamp/Frankfurt. Whilst Elias was still alive at that time and hesitated to agree to a biography planned by Hermann Korte as well as by Stephen Mennell (Ernst 2015)<sup>1</sup>, now, 25 years later, the third edition in German was published. This long temporal distance has led to new insights about Norbert Elias, especially in terms of his early youth, for example as a member of the Wanderbund (Hiking League) “Blau Weiß” in Heidelberg etc.

This English edition aims to transfer Hermann Korte's research results to an English speaking audience, too. Whereas for the 1970s one could identify a hesitating reception of process-theoretical thinking, there has been a growing audience

1 Ernst, Stefanie. *The 'Formation of the Figurational Family': Generational Chains of Process-Sociological Thinking in Europe*. In: CAMBIO: Rivista sulle trasformazioni sociali 05, 2015, No. 09: 65–78. doi: 10.1400/234057.

in the last roughly 20 years. Meanwhile, Elias's book "The Process of Civilisation" has become a bestseller of Sociology.

This process of intensified reception has been supported by Johan Goudsblom, Eric Dunning, Stephen Mennell and Hermann Korte. Many other colleagues of the first generation of 'Elias-Scholars' have also to be mentioned (Ernst 2015). As an assistant of Dieter Claessens, Korte helped to organise Elias' first guest professorship in Germany, i.e. in Münster. Korte is, therefore, a member of the generation of elder 'Elias-Scholars', who not only knew him personally but also taught his theory as a professor of Sociology and helped Elias in his late career to become one of the best-known classical sociologists in the world.

Korte, in Eliasian terms, stands in a chain of the generations and is an important figure for the next generation of sociologists, as, for example, also for me.

I got to know Elias' 'process-book' in 1990, the year of Elias's death, in a sociological course about "Theories of Modernization", taught by Georg Weber and Armin Nassehi in Münster. In the following years, Nassehi supervised not only my Master thesis about 'Marriage in the Civilising Process'. He moreover encouraged and supported me to publish this work in a book at Westdeutscher Verlag in 1996. During that time, I met Hermann Korte as I was looking for an opportunity to intensify my studies on process-theory. Then Münster was predominated by systems theory or critical sociology, and as PhD candidate, my 'figurational capital' was too weak. Therefore, Hermann Korte invited me to visit him at Bochum, where he had a network of PhD students and 'Habilitanden', for example Annette Treibel and Gabriele Klein. I became his PhD student and found a suitable possi-

bility to study “Gender relations and leadership” (1998)<sup>2</sup> using Elias’ model of the ‘Established and Outsiders’. Korte introduced me to the figurational family, too, when the ISA congress took place in Bielefeld in July 1994. Thus, he was my personal chain to find access to Elias work, to process-theoretical research and the figurational network, too.

Therefore, with this book I also want to use the good opportunity to revitalise and continue the early connection of Elias with Münster, as an editor and via my institutional background that I continuously establish since by comeback in 2012 at the Institute of Sociology in Münster. In this context in 2016, we organized a conference in Münster about “Changing Power Relations and the Drag Effects of Habitus. Theoretical and Empirical Approaches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”, expected to be published in 2017, and we held a series of lectures in memory of Elias’s Guest professorship in Münster in 1965 about “Gesellschaftsprozesse und individuelle Praxis” (Social Processes and Individual Practice) which will be published at VS in spring 2017.

This book would never have been published without the help of others: therefore, I would, like to thank Elke Korte for her help and support to realise this project, Stefanie Affeldt for her great work of translating the book into English in painstaking detail in what amounts to detective work. Several translations and narrated editions in the English publication of Elias’s “Collected Works” at UCD, differed from the format of the German original texts, esp. concerning the

2 An English short version has been published in the *European Journal of Women's Studies* 10, Nr.3/2003: 277–299 under the title ‘From Blame Gossip to Praise Gossip? Gender, Leadership and Organizational Change’.

footnotes. Here, Behrouz Alikhani gave me great assistance in finding the several texts.

Moreover, with this edition on the occasion of his eightieth birthday I want to thank Hermann Korte, too, as my former supervisor and mentor, who became an important colleague and friend.

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